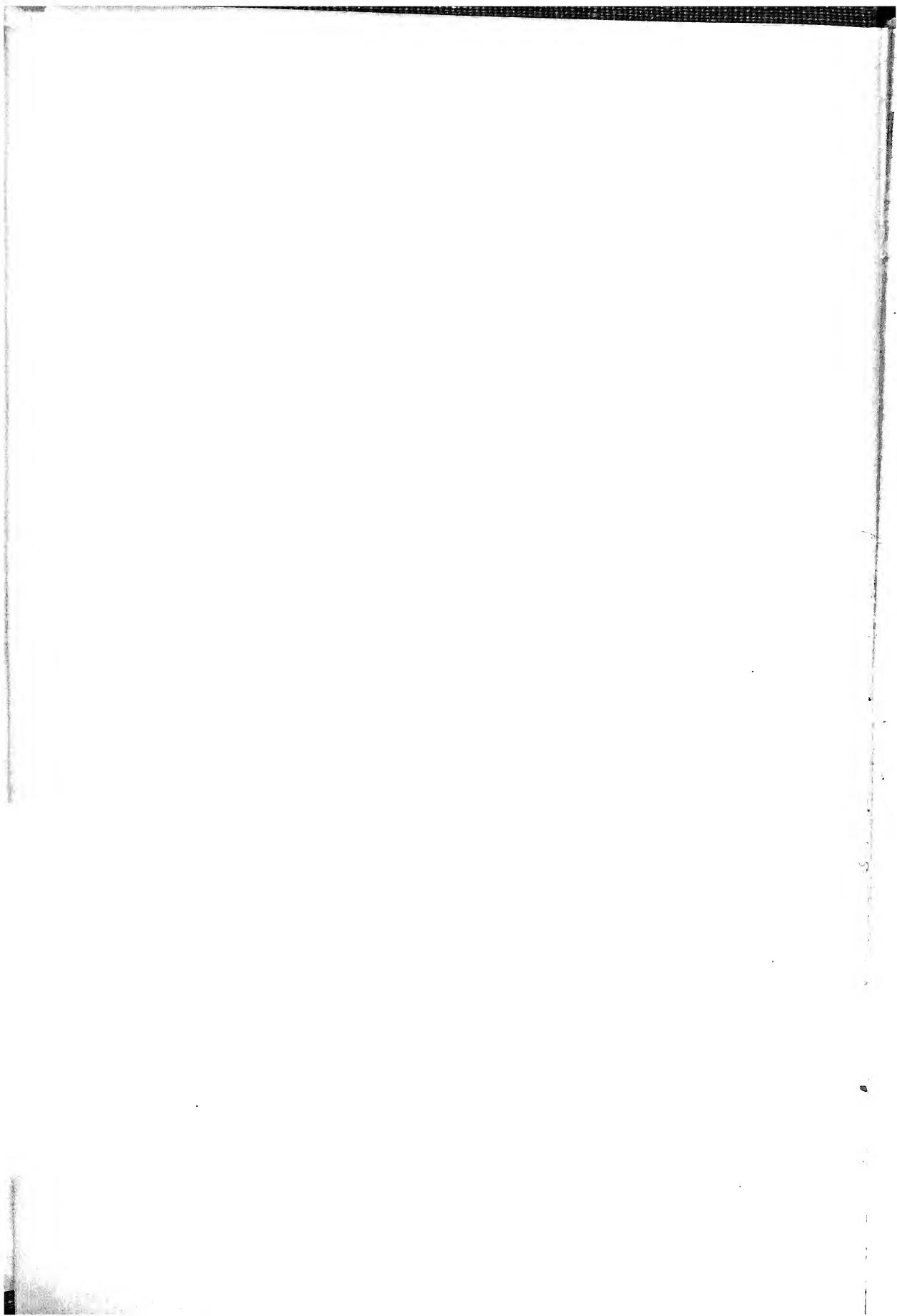


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The Rise
of the
West

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A HISTORY OF THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

by WILLIAM H. McNEILL

DRAWINGS BY BÉLA PETHEÖ

THE



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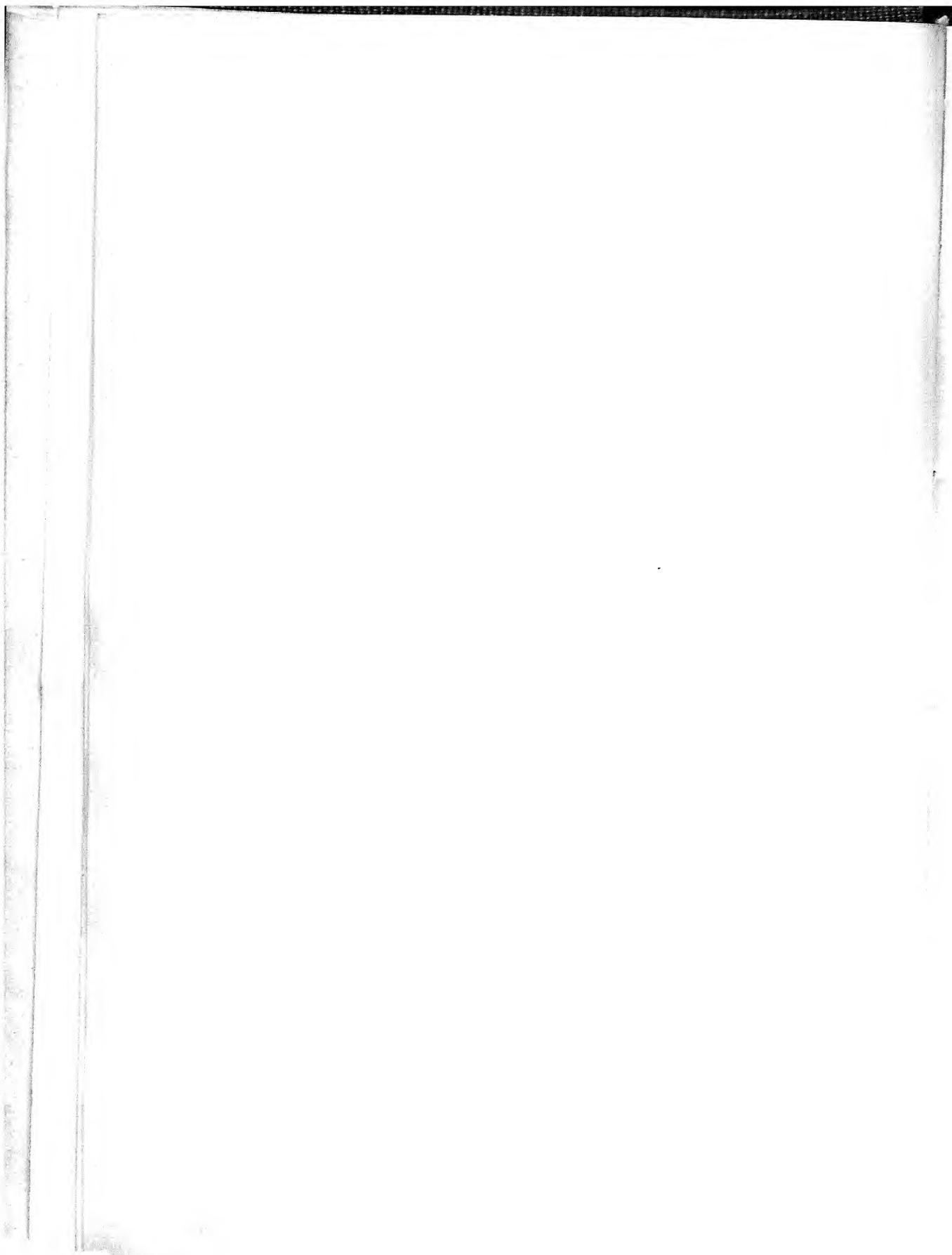
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*I seek to understand, and if I can
To justify the ways of man to man.*

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Preface

This book was conceived in 1936, commenced in 1954, and completed in 1962. The footnotes list most of the works consulted in the course of its composition, but I have made no systematic effort to record the sources of ideas and information accumulated beforehand. The consequence is a lopsidedness of citation, for the passages of the book which concern European history, where my professional interests have lain, almost entirely lack the apparatus of scholarship. A more serious lopsidedness inheres in the text itself, for I have assumed a decent familiarity with Western history and, in dealing with our own past, have chosen to emphasize matters which have been usually underrated, while passing over more familiar ground with a casual reference or even with no mention whatever. This unfits the book for schoolroom use and, hopefully, keys it to the historically literate, adult public of the Western world. Heirs of other civilizations will also, I hope, find stimulus in the following pages but will probably discover passages of needlessly obvious exposition alternating with untoward obscurities.

Discrepancies between the reader's familiar knowledge and an author's presuppositions will always introduce such disproportions, and a book that attempts to deal with so large a subject as the history of the world invites misunderstanding on an unusually massive scale. Yet it is only when others take aspects of what an author has thought and said in order to develop, twist, and reinterpret his ideas to fit their own predilections and answer their own problems that the cold type of a printed page leaps to life; and, if this happens often enough, a single book such as this may become a real force in the cultural history of mankind. Without irony, therefore, I hope my book may be richly and repeatedly misunderstood.

The Rise of the West is designed to be like a three-legged stool, for the text, the photographs, and Béla Petheő's maps and charts are intended to support and mutually reinforce one another. In principle, and perhaps also in practice, an attentive perusal of any one of the three constituents of the

work should offer its own limited yet coherent insight into the history of the human community, whereas the combination of all three is designed to multiply the force and enrich the meaning of any one taken by itself.

* * *

In some sense, everyone I have met as well as all I have ever read enters into this book. Those who have had a closer and more intimate relation with the pages that follow include the students who have served as my assistants during its composition: Hsio Yen Shih, Albert S. Hanser, George W. Smalley, and Jean A. Whitenack, to whose editorial eye and indefatigable typing I am particularly indebted. Colleagues and friends who have read and criticized all or part of the manuscript are: Robert M. Adams, Robert J. Braidwood, Michael Cherniavsky, Pinhas Delougaz, Mircea Eliade, Louis Gottschalk, Robert M. Grant, David Grene, Stephen Hay, Marshall G. S. Hodgson, Bert F. Hoselitz, Walter Johnson, Donald Lach, Christian W. Mackauer, J. A. B. van Buitenen, Karl J. Weintraub, and John A. Wilson of the University of Chicago; Edward Bastian of Earlham College; Pratulchandra Gupta of Jodhpur University, Calcutta; Peter Hardy of London University; Bryce Lyon of the University of California; Walter Porges of Pierce College, California; Earl Pritchard of the University of Arizona; Arnold J. Toynbee of the Royal Institute of International Affairs; G. E. von Grunebaum of the University of California, Los Angeles; Y. C. Wang of the University of Kansas; Martin Wight of Sussex University; and my father, John T. McNeill of Union Theological Seminary, New York. All these have contributed in greater or lesser degree to the improvement of this volume, but none is in the least responsible for whatever errors of fact or of interpretation remain to disfigure its pages.

A Ford Faculty Fellowship, 1954-55, allowed me leisure and gave me courage to begin the composition of this book, and a munificent grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York permitted me to devote six months of each year from 1957 to 1962 to concentrated work upon the task. Without such help the book might never have been undertaken and could most certainly not yet have come to completion.

Last, the University of Chicago provided the genial matrix within which my thoughts and investigations arose and have now taken tangible form, while the narrower circle of my family graciously tolerated the cuckoo in the nest this book has been to them these eight years past. I am very grateful to both.

WILLIAM H. MCNEILL

September 25, 1962